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In a fourteenth century manuscript of the Book of Creation (Sefer Yetsira) now in the British Library I found the following story, just before the text proper begins:

When Abraham was born ... God consulted with SY which said, "Give (me to him)". So God handed it over to Abraham and he sat alone and meditated on SY and he could not understand it at all until there came a heavenly voice and said to him, "Do you seek to compare anything with me? I am One and I created SY and investigated it and made everything which is written in it. You cannot understand it on your own. Go to Shem and look at it together and understand it". Immediately Abraham went to Shem his teacher and sat down with him for three years and they found out how to create the world.(1)

The moral of this story is clear. SY is impossible to understand on one's own and it takes a long time to grasp it when studied with someone else. However, the rewards of perseverance are great! The rewards of studying it can also be satisfying at a more material level than learning how to create the world. Here is another story, found in the Babylonian Talmud, about two third century rabbis:

Rav Hanina and Rav Hoshayah occupied themselves on the eve of every Sabbath with the Book of Creation. They made a calf one-third the natural size and ate it.(2)

Well, I have been studying SY now for a good deal longer than three years. I have certainly tried studying it with someone else - my honours class in Jewish Mysticism. But I have unfortunately heard no heavenly voice; I have been unable to create a calf and I have certainly not found out how God created the world.

SY is indeed an exceedingly difficult text to understand. Jewish scholars and commentators have been trying to explain it for over 1,000 years in a multitude of commentaries beginning with that of Saadya Gaon in the early tenth century. It is a very short text written in the same kind of Hebrew as that of the codification of the Oral Law - the Mishnah. This is the second stage of the Hebrew language, coming after Biblical Hebrew and arising perhaps in the second century B.C. This phase of the language lasted well into the Talmudic period (3rd-6th centuries A.D.), merging imperceptibly into rabbinic Hebrew which held the stage until the rise of Modern Hebrew at the end of the last century. From the standpoint of its language SY cannot be earlier than the second to third century A.D. It was written in Palestine possibly, I would argue, in Tiberias around 300. It was first quoted by a sixth century (?) Hebrew poet, Kalir, and used in an eighth century astrological text (Baraita de-Shmuel). From the tenth century on it was regarded as a very ancient text either written by Abraham or handed down orally from him and summing up Jewish thought on the subject of creation. Its role in the development of Jewish thought has been immense though Louis Ginzberg in the Jewish Encyclopaedia probably overstates the case when he says:

It may even be said that this work had a greater influence on the development of the Jewish mind than almost any other book after the completion of the Talmud.(3)

What interests me about this text is that it is completely unlike any

other Jewish work produced in the Talmudic period. In the words of Ithamar Gruenwald it "occupies a kind of spiritual isolation, that is positively unique in the history of Hebrew literature".(4) There is no reference in SY to Moses and his Torah, or to the people of Israel. In fact, the author hardly refers to the Bible at all. He certainly does not claim it as the source for his authority. He tells us how things are; he does not derive his information from biblical interpretation. SY is totally uninterested in history, hence the absence of any reference to the Jewish people. It is not pseudonymous, a fact in itself almost unique for Jewish texts in the post-biblical period. It does make a reference in its final paragraph to how Abraham successfully used its techniques to call up God, but it does not claim to derive from him. So SY is a striking example of how pluralistic Judaism could be after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., despite the mistaken view of many scholars that the pluralism which had characterised Judaism before the loss of the Temple was, after this event, increasingly crushed by the Pharisees become rabbis. SY as a testimony to the pluralistic nature of Judaism in the Talmudic period is the centre of my interest in it.

Most Jewish texts from the first millennium A.D. are like strips of flypaper. As time goes on so many flies stick to them that in the end the flypaper is invisible. There are over 130 manuscripts of SY known to exist and they contain widely variant texts. For example, in paragraph 1 the manuscript with the shortest text has 13 words, the one with the longest text has 29 words. However, the Mss can be grouped into three main recensions - a Short and a Long Recension, and a recension used by the first commentator, Saadya, and hence called the Saadyan Recension. The Long Recension contains 64 paragraphs, the Short and Saadyan Recensions about 50 paragraphs. Apart from a Preliminary Critical Edition prepared in 1971 by the Israeli scholar Ithamar Gruenwald(5) which is difficult to use and marred by errors, there is no satisfactory edition of this text. All translations into any language which I have seen are more or less useless as is nearly all the work done on SY before 1971 by scholars and pseudo-scholars. A lot of the latter have had a go at translating and interpreting it. The early printed editions on which these translations are based derive from the late medieval texts which are very corrupt and overlaid with kabbalistic glosses. Too many flies have stuck to the flypaper for the original SY to be any longer discernible. I am in the process of preparing a new critical edition based on 20 of the earliest and best Mss. along with a commentary in which I hope to peel at least some of the flies off the flypaper. My translation of Ms A, the earliest manuscript of the Long Recension, is given here as Appendix 1.

There is considerable confusion in the recensions and Mss about the division of the material, and the Saadyan recension, in particular, has an arrangement all its own. I will follow here the order of the Short and Long Recensions which is, in my judgment, that of the original author. The structure of his tract is fairly transparent (see Appendix 2):

Paragraphs 1-16 These introduce the ten sefirot which are defined as follows in paragraph 16 (Ms K, Short Recension):

These are the ten sefirot belima: the Spirit of the Living God, and aether, water, fire, above, below, east, west, north, and south.

The term sefirot belima is exceedingly obscure - literally "countings without anything". Belima comes from Job 26:7: He (God) suspends the world on belima ("nothing" according to the RSV, "the void" according to the NEB). The noun sefira (of which sefirot is the plural) is the verbal

noun of the root s-f-r which means "to count, to relate". "Ten ideal agencies which can be numbered" is the best I can do with the Hebrew phrase eser sefirot belima which prefaces paragraphs 2-11, 16. These ten agencies represent the pre-conditions for creation - the basic elements (air, water, fire) and physical space, though paragraph 7 gives the first 4 both a temporal and a moral dimension as well.

Paragraphs 17-22 These paragraphs introduce the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet which are divided into three groups:

- 1 Alef, Mem, Shin - called the three matrices or mothers.
- 2 BGDKPRT - the seven double letters. These letters have a slightly different aspirated pronunciation if they follow a vowel in contrast to the normal harder sound when they begin a syllable.
- 3 The twelve simple letters - the rest of the letters of the alphabet.

Paragraphs 18-19 describe how God combined these letters together to produce his creation. Paragraph 19:

Twenty-two letters: he carved them out, he hewed them, he weighed them and exchanged them, he combined them and formed with them the life of all creation and the life of all that would be formed. How did he weigh and exchange them? - Alef with them all, and them all with Alef; Bet with them all, and them all with Bet, etc.

The following paragraphs take up this threefold division of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and use them as a tool for demonstrating the harmonious parallelism of the macrocosm - the universe and time - with the microcosm, mankind.

Paragraphs 23-36 These paragraphs deal with the three matrices - Alef, Mem, Shin. These three letters are singled out for two reasons:

- 1 Their very pronunciation illustrates a basic principle of the author's cosmology: reality consists of a conflict between two contradictory principles with another principle holding the balance between them, e.g. paragraph 26:

Three matrices - Alef, Mem, Shin. Mem is silent, Shin hisses, Alef is the balancing item.

- 2 The second reason for the singling out of these three letters is because they express the dominant sounds in the words for the realities which they represent (paragraph 28; Long Recension):

Three matrices - Alef, Mem, Shin - in the universe: aether, water and fire. Heaven was created first from fire ('esh), and earth was created from water (mayim), and air ('awir) was created from aether holding the balance between them.

The triadic pattern of a positive, negative and balancing item exists on four levels - the universe, time, mankind, and the realm of morality (see Appendix 2). In the realm of time (shana, literally, "year") the author refers to the three states of matter in the course of the year, not the four seasons; threes not fours suit his purpose at this point. As an aside, I should say that his language is strikingly non-sexist. He does not use the generic Hebrew term for mankind, 'adam, which, of course, is a male figure in Genesis 2-3. But he uses either the completely neutral term nefesh (soul, living being) or the explicit terms "male and female". Unfortunately, he rather spoils things a little when he gives the com-

bination of the three letters which creates the female, namely, Alef, Shin, Mem. Hebrew speakers could not fail to recognise here the word 'asham (guilt)! Thus paragraph 32:

He made Alef rule over aether, and bound to it a crown, and combined them with each other, and formed with them air in the universe, humidity in the year, and the chest in mankind, male and female - male with Alef, Mem, Shin, and female with Alef, Shin, Mem.

Paragraphs 37-44 These deal with the seven double letters. Their double pronunciation speaks to the author of the same basic conflict of contradictory principles in the universe as is represented by the three matrices (see Appendix 2). In the physical universe they correspond to the seven planets; in time, to the seven days of the week; in mankind, to the seven apertures of the human head. These letters also represent the structure of physical space (paragraph 38; Short Recension, Mss LMMPQ):

Seven double letters - Bet, Gimel, Dalet, Kaf, Pe, Resh, Tav, corresponding to the seven edges (of the universe). From them are the six edges (a place of six edges Mss LP) - above and below, east and west, north and south. And the Holy Temple is exactly in the middle.

Paragraphs 45-55 These present the 12 simple letters - basically what is left of the Hebrew alphabet after extracting the three matrices and the seven doubles. 12 is, of course, a number of considerable symbolic significance in the Old Testament, though our author never refers to the 12 tribes of Israel. The 12 simple letters correspond to or, more accurately, create the 12 signs of the zodiac, the 12 months of the year, and the 12 principal bodily actions and organs in mankind (paragraph 49; Long Recension):

Twelve simple letters: He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof. He carved them and hewed them out, he combined them, weighed them and exchanged them, and formed with them the twelve constellations in the universe, the twelve months in the year, and the twelve principal organs in mankind.

Like the seven double letters the simple letters also reflect the structure of the physical space (paragraph 47; Ms A, Long Recension):

Twelve diagonal lines, radiating out to the six faces (of a cube), separating in each direction: - the south-eastern line, the upper eastern line, etc. ... And they expand continually for ever and ever and they are the arms of the universe (cf. Deut. 33:27).(6)

In this section of his work as in the others the author finds a way to state his "law of the opposites" in that, for him, the twofold structure of many bodily organs speaks of the conflict at the heart of reality (paragraph 48; Ms A, Long Recension):

... the internal organs and the two hands and feet. He made them a sort of lawsuit, he arranged them in battle array, one opposite the other (cf. Eccles. 7:14).

Paragraphs 56-64 The final paragraphs of the text sum up some of the author's principal themes. Unfortunately there are more flies here than in any other part of the text, as scribe after scribe tried his own hand at drawing together the diverse themes of SY. Of these nine paragraphs

only five appear either in whole or in part in the Short Recension. Basing myself on these paragraphs only it would appear that the author wishes to stress three themes:

- 1 The correspondence of the macrocosm and the microcosm (paragraph 58; all recensions):

Three fathers and their offspring, and seven dominant ones and their hosts, and the twelve diagonal lines. And a proof for the matter - trustworthy witnesses: the universe, the year, and mankind.

The second sentence of this paragraph was clearly an important one for the author. It occurs also in paragraphs 43 and 53, and reveals, I think, one clue to the success of SY in securing such an important position in the history of Jewish tradition. SY provides a kind of quasi-scientific proof of the deep-rooted Jewish view that man is made in the image of God and has been given a position in the scheme of things only a little lower than that of the angels (see Genesis 1:26f, and Psalm 8). The author expresses this Old Testament perception in a form which was common in his Greco-Roman environment in late Antiquity. That man is a microcosm of the universe was a commonplace sentiment at the time; it appears, for example, in Plato's *Timaeus*. What eventually gave our author's statement of it such an important influence on later Jewish thought was the way in which he not only seemed to be providing proof and witnesses but also giving such a pivotal role to the Hebrew alphabet. The Torah (the Pentateuch) was written in the Hebrew alphabet. Jewish tradition had long since assigned to the Torah a key role in the creation of the world. This belief, which was at the heart of rabbinic Judaism, was subsequently amalgamated with the insights of SY and the result was the Kabbalah.

- 2 The second theme which the author clearly wishes to stress at the end of his tract is the law of the opposites (paragraph 60; Short Recension):

So God has created every object, one opposite the other (Eccles. 7:14): good opposite evil - evil from evil and good from good. Good brings evil to light, and evil brings good to light. Good is stored up for the good and evil is preserved for the evil.

Like the theme of the role of man in the scheme of things this triangular pattern of good versus evil with God holding the balance between them is deeply rooted in Old Testament and Jewish tradition. It may seem to those unfamiliar with this tradition to compromise the unyielding monotheism which is supposed to be at the heart of Judaism. Judaism is indeed unyieldingly monotheistic but at the price of being fairly sure where the ultimate responsibility for evil lay. Since God must, in some sense, be responsible for evil then he, just like man, is subject to an inner conflict between opposed parts of his being. As SY makes quite clear, you cannot have good without evil. Rabbinic Judaism entirely agreed with this. What the Kabbalah did was to take up this perception, read paragraphs 1-16 of SY as though the Sefirot were actually part of God, and then account for the origin of evil as resulting from disharmony and conflict amongst the Sefirot.

- 3 The third theme is the revelation of the Hebrew alphabet to Abraham (paragraph 61):

When Abraham our father came, and looked, and saw, and investi-

gated, and understood, and carved, and combined, and hewed, and pondered, and succeeded, the Lord of all was revealed to him. And he made him sit in his bosom, and kissed him upon his head. He called him his friend and named him his son, and made a covenant with him and his seed for ever. And he trusted in the Lord, and he accounted it to him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6). And he invoked upon him the glory of the Lord, as it is written: Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, etc. (Jer. 1:5). He made with him a covenant between the ten toes of his feet - it is circumcision. He made with him a covenant between the ten fingers of his hands - it is language/the tongue. He bound twenty-two letters into his language/tongue, and the Holy One revealed to him the secret. He drew them out into water, he burned them into fire, he shook them into the air, he branded them into the seven, he led them into the twelve constellations.

Unfortunately, the textual transmission of this paragraph is very uncertain. The Saadyan version has 20 words, whereas the Long and Short Recensions have about 90 words. Here I have cited the long recension. The author draws here on many Jewish traditions about the revelation of God's unity to Abraham and his receipt of the Hebrew language, the language of creation. But look at the syntax! Abraham himself works out the secrets as they are presented in SY and then God is revealed to him. This syntactical structure is preserved in all MSS. The rather heterodox character of SY is clearly revealed at this point. Man can manipulate God, if he gets his methods straight. The Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden is reversed; Man, the microcosm of the universe, has become like God. This theme of the power of man occurs very near the beginning of SY (paragraph 4):

Ten sefirot belima: ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand with wisdom, and be wise with understanding. Test them and investigate them; know and ponder, and form (a mental image). Explain the matter clearly, and restore the Creator to his place. And their measure is ten, for they have no end.

It went straight into the heart of the medieval Kabbalah - by his mystical meditations on the ten sefirot the adept can correct the broken and disharmonious structure not only within the universe but within God himself ("restore the Creator to his place"). But all this lay in the future as medieval Jewish mystics took up SY and made of it what they wanted to make.

One theme which pervades SY but which, unfortunately, the author made no attempt to sum up, is that of creation. How God created the world in the view of this tract is exceedingly difficult to work out, not only because there seems to be two contradictory theories offered in paragraphs 1-16 and in the rest of the book, but also because the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo has been superimposed upon it in the early medieval period. Let us dispose of this point first. Contrast the following two versions of paragraph 1:

By 32 wondrous paths of wisdom the Lord of hosts carved out (the universe?), with three groups of letters: with sefer and sfar and sippur. (MS Q, Short Recension)

Yah, the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, the Living God, God Almighty, high and lofty, dwelling for ever, and holy is his name (cf. Is. 57:15), carved out 32 wondrous paths of wisdom. He created his universe with three (groups of) letters: with sefer and sefer and sefer. (MS A, Long Recension)

Apart from the list of divine names, what is missing in the shorter version is the explicit statement that God created his world. This statement in the longer version uses the verb bara' which dominates the Genesis 1 account of creation. Our author has a clear preference for an entirely different set of words: hagaq (he carved out), hatsav (he engraved), yatsar (he formed), and tsar (he created). In no paragraph in SY is the verb bara' attested in all three recensions, while the verb asah (he made) is attested in only two paragraphs. But the expression "he carved out and engraved" is firmly attested throughout the text.

Now let us look at two of the many versions of paragraph 20:

He formed substance from chaos (<u>tohu</u>), and he made the non- existent exist, and he hewed out great columns from intangible air. (Short Recension)	He formed substance from chaos (<u>tohu</u>), and he made it with fire and it exists, and he hewed out great columns from intangible air. (Long Recension, Mss AB)
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It would take me too long to prove to you now the originality of the version which says: "He formed from tohu (the formless chaos of Gen. 1:2) something and made it with fire and it exists". I hope to do that in my book. However, I am quite sure that the statement "He made the non-existent exist" comes from another realm of thought than that of our author - the world of early medieval Jewish philosophy.

The clue to the underlying theory of creation in SY is given in a very interesting story cited in Genesis Rabba, which is the earliest rabbinic attempt to interpret the Book of Genesis. It was compiled about 400 A.D.

A certain philosopher asked Rabban Gamaliel, saying to him: "Your God was indeed a great artist, but surely he found good materials which assisted him?" "What are they", said he to him. "Tohu, bohu, darkness, water, wind and the deep", replied he. (Genesis Rabba, 1:9)

Rabban Gamaliel proceeds to provide proof that God created all these supposedly pre-existing materials. Now the term "artist" used in the text of Genesis Rabba is interesting. The Hebrew word is tsayyar. Words formed from this root are the ones most frequently used in SY for God's creative activity. Moreover the frequent use of the verbs "He carved out and engraved" clearly reflect a view of God as the Great Artist and Sculptor. In other words, the doctrine of creation in SY is precisely that ascribed in Genesis Rabba to the "certain philosopher" who is opposed by Rabban Gamaliel.

Another polemical reference in Genesis Rabba confronts directly the doctrine of creation stated in SY paragraph 20:

Whoever comes to say that this world was created out of tohu and bohu (the chaos of Gen. 1:2) does he not impair (God's glory)? (Genesis Rabba, 1:5)

This comment is, however, followed by another saying to the effect that, much as we may not like it, there is no other way in which to read Genesis 1:1-3.

The fact that the view that God created the world like an artist using pre-existing materials is attributed to a "certain philosopher" is, of course, a very useful clue to some of the influences which played upon the author of SY. These were almost certainly a Jewish version of neoplatonism similar to that which appears in the 1st century Alexandrian

Jewish philosopher, Philo. Our author was also in touch with many non-Jewish streams of thought on the fringes of Christianity and Gnosticism. In fact, the closest parallels to his whole tract appear in the system of the late second century Valentinian Gnostic, Marcos, who came from Samaria.⁽⁷⁾ One can find parallels somewhere in the world of Late Antiquity to almost every thought expressed in SY. But the way in which it puts them together represents a unique expression of a deeply-rooted Jewish conviction which is central also in Old Testament thought, namely: language creates reality - ultimately everything can be reduced to words (paragraph 22):

He looks and exchanges; he makes all creation and all speech one name. And a sign for the matter: twenty-two objects (= the letters of the Hebrew alphabet) in one body.

The first thing God does in the Bible is to speak. When he speaks, he speaks in Hebrew. From this fact flows all reality as we experience it. SY is nothing more, and nothing less, than an inspired attempt to make sense of that great wayyomer (and he said) of Genesis 1.

Notes

- 1 British Museum, Add.15,299, fols. 26a-b. Cf. G. Scholem, On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, London, 1965, pp. 158 ff.
- 2 Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin, 65b, 67b.
- 3 Jewish Encyclopaedia, vol. 6, p. 603.
- 4 Ithamar Gruenwald, "Some Critical Notes on the First Part of Sefer Yezira", Revue des etudes juives, 132 (1973), 475-512.
- 5 Ithamar Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of Sefer Yezira", Israel Oriental Studies, 1 (1971), 132-177.
- 6 None of the manuscripts has preserved paragraph 47 intact. In Appendix 1 I have translated the text exactly as it stands in Ms A.
- 7 Most of what we know about Marcos and his system is contained in the extracts from his work quoted by Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book 1, chapters 13-22.

SEFER YETSIRA

(A translation of Ms A, the earliest manuscript
of the long recension)

SY1 Yah, the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, the Living God, God Almighty, high and lofty, dwelling for ever, and holy is his name (Is.57:15), carved out thirty-two wondrous paths of wisdom. He created his universe with three (groups of) letters: with sefer, and sefer and sefer.

SY2 Ten sefirot belima and twenty-two fundamental letters.

SY3 Ten sefirot belima: the number of the ten fingers, five opposite five, and the covenant of the unity is placed exactly in the middle by the word of the tongue and the mouth, and the circumcision of the foreskin.

SY4 Ten sefirot belima: ten and not nine, ten and not eleven. Understand with wisdom, and be wise with understanding. Test them and investigate them; know and ponder, and form (a mental image). Explain the matter clearly, and restore the Creator to his place. And their measure is ten, for they have no end.

SY5 Ten sefirot belima: restrain your heart from thinking; restrain your mouth from speaking. And if your heart races return to the place from whence you came, and remember that thus it is written: *And the living creatures ran to and fro* (Ezek.1:14). And concerning this matter a covenant was made.

SY6 Their measure is ten, for they have no end. Their end is fixed in their beginning as the flame is bound to the *burning coal* (cf. Ezek.1:13). Know and ponder, and form (a mental image) that the Lord is unique and the Creator one, and he has none second to him; and before one, what can you count?

SY7 Ten sefirot belima; and their measure is ten, for they have no end - dimension of beginning and dimension of end, dimension of good and dimension of evil, dimension of above and dimension of below, dimension of east and dimension of west, dimension of north and dimension of south. And the unique Lord, a trustworthy divine king, rules over them all from his holy abode for ever and ever.

SY8 Ten sefirot belima: looking at them is like observing lightning, and their end? - they have no limit. His word is in them as though *running* (k^o raso, Ezek.1:14), and they pursue his command like the storm wind, and before his throne they bow down.

SY9 Ten sefirot belima and twenty-two fundamental letters - three matrices, seven double letters, and twelve simple ones; and the Spirit is one of them.

SY10 Ten sefirot belima: one - the Spirit of the Living God. *His throne is established from of old* (Ps.93:2). Twice blessed is the name of him who lives for ever. Voice, and air (ruah) and speech - this is the Holy Spirit (ruah).

SY11 Ten sefirot belima: one - the Spirit of the Living God; two - aether (ruah) from the Holy Spirit; three - water from aether; four - fire

from water; and above and below, east and west, north and south.

SY12 Two - aether from Spirit: he carved and hewed in it the four directions of space - east and west, north and south. And the Spirit is in each one of them.

SY13 Three - water from aether: he carved and hewed in it *tohu* and *bohu* (cf. Gen.1:2), *mud* and *mire* (cf. Is.57:20). He made then like a sort of garden-bed (cf. Song of Songs 6:2). He erected them like a sort of wall, and he wove them like a sort of ceiling. And he poured out snow over them and it became dust, for it is said: *For to the snow he says, "Become earth"* (Job 37:6). *Tohu* is a green line which surrounds the world. *Bohu* is the slimy stones sunk in the abysses between which the water comes out.

SY14 Four - fire from water: he carved and hewed in it the throne of glory, and the *Ophanim* and the *Serafim*, and the holy living creatures, and the ministering angels. And from the three of them he founded his abode: *he makes his angels winds* (ruhot), his servants a flaming fire (Ps.104:4).

SY15 Five - he sealed above. He chose three simple letters and fixed them in his great name - YHW. And he sealed with them the six edges (of the universe), and turned upwards and sealed it with YHW. Six - he sealed below. He turned downwards and sealed it with YWH. Seven - he sealed the east. He turned in front and sealed it with HYW. Eight - he sealed the west. He turned behind and sealed it with HWY. Nine - he sealed the south. He turned to his right and sealed it with WYH. Ten - he sealed the north. He turned to his left and sealed it with WHY.

SY16 These are the ten sefirot belima: one - the Spirit of the Living God; two - aether from the Spirit; three - water from aether; four - fire from water; and the height above, and below, east and west, north and south.

SY17 Twenty-two fundamental letters: three matrices, seven double letters, and twelve simple ones. They are carved out by the voice, hewed out in the air, fixed in the mouth in five positions: Alef, Het; He, Ayin; Bet, Waw, Mem, Pe; Gimel, Yod, Kaf, Qof; Dalet, Tet, Lamed, Nun, Taw; Zayin, Samek, Sade, Resh, Shin. They are bound to the tip of the tongue as the flame to the burning coal. Alef, He, Het, Ayin are pronounced at the back of the tongue and in the throat. Bet, Waw, Mem, Pe are pronounced between the teeth and by the tip of the tongue. Gimel, Yod, Kaf, Qof are cut off a third of the way up the tongue. Dalet, Tet, Lamed, Nun, Taw are pronounced by the tip of the tongue with the voice. Zayin, Sade, Resh, Shin (are pronounced) between the teeth with the tongue relaxed.

SY18 Twenty-two fundamental letters. They are fixed on a wheel with two hundred and twenty-one gates. The wheel rotates backwards and forwards. And this is the sign of the matter: if for good, above pleasure (ng), and if for evil, below pain (ng).

SY19 Twenty-two letters: he carved them out, he hewed them, he weighed them and exchanged them, he combined them and formed with them the life of all creation and the life of all that would be formed. How did he weigh and exchange them? - Alef with them all, and them all with Alef; Bet with

them all, and them all with Bet; Gimel with them all, and them all with Gimel. And they all rotate in turn. The result is that they go out by two hundred and twenty-one gates. The result is that all creation and all speech go out by one name.

SY20 He formed substance from chaos, and he made it with fire and it exists, and he hewed out great columns from intangible air. This is the sign:

SY21 (This paragraph sets out the great columns of combinations of each letter of the alphabet with all the others)

SY22 He looks and exchanges; he makes all creation and all speech one name. And a sign for the matter: twenty-two objects in one body.

SY23 Three matrices: Alef, Mem, Shin. Their basis is the scale of acquittal and the scale of guilt, and the language of law holds the balance between them.

SY24 Three matrices: Alef, Mem, Shin - a great secret, hidden and ineffable, and sealed with six seals. And from it goes out fire, water and aether, and it is enveloped in male and female. Know and ponder and form (a mental image) that fire evaporates water.

SY25 Three matrices: Alef, Mem, Shin. The offspring of the heavens - fire; the offspring of air - aether; the offspring of earth - water; fire above, water below, and aether is the balancing item.

SY26 Three matrices: Alef, Mem, Shin. Mem is silent, Shin hisses, Alef is the balancing item.

SY27 Three matrices: Alef, Mem, Shin. And from them were born three fathers from whom everything was created.

SY28 Three matrices - Alef, Mem, Shin - in the universe: aether, water and fire. Heaven was created first from fire, and earth was created from water, and air was created from aether, holding the balance between them.

SY29 Three matrices - Alef, Mem, Shin - in the year: fire, water and aether. Heat was created from fire, cold was created from water, and humidity from aether holding the balance between them.

SY30 Three matrices - Alef, Mem, Shin - in mankind. The head was created from fire, the belly from water, and the chest from aether holding the balance between them.

SY31 Three matrices: Alef, Mem, Shin. He carved them, hewed them, combined them and sealed with them the three matrices in the universe, and the three matrices in the year, and the three matrices in mankind, male and female.

SY32 He made Alef rule over aether, and bound to it a crown, and combined them with each other, and formed with them air in the universe, humidity in the year, and the chest in mankind, male and female - male with Alef, Mem, Shin, and female with Alef, Shin, Mem.

SY33 He made Mem rule over water, and bound to it a crown, and combined them with each other, and formed with it earth in the universe, cold in the year, and the belly in mankind, male and female.

SY34 He made Shin rule over fire, and bound to it a crown, and combined them with each other, and formed with it heaven in the universe, and heat in the year, and the head in mankind, male and female.

SY35 How did he combine them? - AMSh, ASHm, MASH, MSHA, SHMA, SHAM - heaven/fire, air/aether, earth/water. Man's head is fire, his belly water, his heart aether.

SY36 Three matrices: Alef, Mem, Shin.

There was formed with Alef: aether, air, humidity, the chest, law, and language(the tongue).

There was formed with Mem: earth, cold, the belly, and the scale of acquittal.

There was formed with Shin: heaven, heat, the head, and the scale of guilt.

This is Alef, Mem, Shin.

SY37 Seven double letters: Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaf, Pe, Resh, Taw. Their basis is life and peace, wisdom, wealth, prosperity, beauty and mastery. They are pronounced with the tongue in two different positions, for they represent two categories of opposites: Bet/Vet, Gimel/Ghimel, Dalet/ Dhalet, Kaf/Khaf, Pe/Fe, Resh/Rhesh, Taw/Thaw, corresponding to soft and hard, a paradigm of strong and weak. They are opposites. The opposite of life is death; the opposite of peace is evil; the opposite of wisdom is folly; the opposite of wealth is poverty; the opposite of prosperity is desolation; the opposite of beauty is ugliness; and the opposite of mastery is slavery.

SY38 Seven double letters: Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaf, Pe, Resh, Taw. Seven and not six, seven and not eight - (corresponding to) the six ribs and the six faces (of a cube), and the Holy Temple set in the middle. *Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place*(Ezek.3:12) - he is the place of his world, but his world is not his place. And he supports them all.

SY39 Seven double letters: Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaf, Pe, Resh, Taw. He carved and hewed them, he combined and weighed them, and he formed with them the planets in the universe, the days in the year, and the apertures in mankind, by sevens.

SY40 How did he combine them? - two stones build two houses; three build six houses; four build twenty-four houses; five build one hundred and twenty houses; six build seven hundred and twenty houses; seven build five thousand and forty houses. From here on go out and ponder what the mouth cannot speak, and what the eye cannot see, and what the ear cannot hear.

SY41(1) He made Bet rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Saturn in the universe, the sabbath in the year, and the mouth in mankind.

(2)He made Gimel rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Jupiter in the universe, the first day of the week in the year, and the right eye in mankind.

(3)He made Dalet rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined with another, and formed with it Mars in the universe, the second day of the

week in the year, and the left eye in mankind.

(4)He made Kaf rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Sun in the universe, the third day of the week in the year, and the right nostril in mankind.

(5)He made Pe rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Venus in the universe, the fourth day of the week in the year, and the left nostril in mankind.

(6)He made Resh rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Mercury in the universe, the fifth day of the week in the year, and the right ear in mankind.

(7)He made Taw rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it the Moon in the universe, the sixth day of the week in the year, and the left ear in mankind.

SY42 And with them were carved out seven firmaments, seven earths, seven hours and seven days. Therefore he loved the seventh above everything under heaven.

SY43 These are the seven planets in the universe: Sun, Venus,
Mercury, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars.

And the seven days: the seven days of creation.

And the seven apertures in mankind: two eyes, two ears, two nostrils,
and the mouth.

And the seven firmaments: Wilon, Raqia , Shehaqim, Zebul, Ma on, Makon,
Arabot.

And the seven earths: 'dama, arqa, tebel, neshiyya, siyya, heled,
'eres.

He split up the witnesses and made each one stand by itself - the universe by itself, the year by itself, mankind by itself.

SY44 Seven double letters: Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaf, Pe, Resh, Taw.

There was formed with Bet: Saturn, the sabbath, the mouth, life and
death.

There was formed with Gimel: Jupiter, the first day of the week, the
right eye, peace and evil.

There was formed with Dalet: Mars, the second day of the week, the
left eye, wisdom and folly.

There was formed with Kaf: the Sun, the third day of the week, the
right nostril, wealth and poverty.

There was formed with Pe: Venus, the fourth day of the week, the left
nostril, prosperity and desolation.

There was formed with Resh: Mercury, the fifth day of the week, the
right ear, beauty and ugliness.

There was formed with Taw: the Moon, the preparation of the sabbath,
the left ear, mastery and slavery.

SY45 Twelve simple letters: He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek,
Ayin, Sade, Qof. Their basis is sight, hearing, smelling, talking, eating, sexual
intercourse, action, walking, anger, laughter, thought and sleep.

SY46 Twelve simple letters: He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek,
Ayin, Sade, Qof. Twelve and not eleven, twelve and not thirteen.

SY47 Twelve diagonal lines, radiating out to the six faces (of a cube),
separating in each direction: - the south-eastern line, the upper eastern line,
the lower eastern line, the lower northern line, the north-western line, the
upper northern line, the lower western line, the upper western line, the
upper western line, the lower western line, the lower southern line, the
upper southern line. And they expand continually for ever and ever and they
are the arms of the universe(cf. Deut.33:27).

SY48 Twelve simple letters: He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek,
Ayin, Sade, Qof. He carved them, he combined them, he hewed them, he
weighed them and exchanged them, and formed with them the constellations,
the months, and the principal (bodily) organs: two exultant ones, two babbling
ones, two deliberating ones and two rejoicing ones. They are the internal
organs and the two hands and feet. He made them a sort of lawsuit, he
arranged them in battle array, one opposite the other(cf.Eccles.7:14). Three -
each one stands by itself; seven - three are at loggerheads with three, and
one is the law which decides between them. Twelve stand in battle array:
three are hostile but three love; three give life but three kill. And the
divine, trustworthy king rules over them all - one on top of three, and
three on top of seven, and seven on top of twelve. And they all adhere to
each other. And the sign for the matter is: twenty-two objects in one body.

SY49 Twelve simple letters: He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek,
Ayin, Sade, Qof. He carved them and hewed them out, he combined them,
weighed them and exchanged them, and formed with them the twelve
constellations in the universe, the twelve months in the year, and the twelve
principal organs in mankind.

These are the twelve constellations in the universe: Aries, Taurus, Gemini,
Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Saggitarius, Capricorn, Aquarius,
Pisces.

And the twelve months are: Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, Elul, Tishri,
Marheshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, Adar.

These are the twelve principal organs in mankind: two hands, two feet, two
kidneys, the liver, the gall, the spleen, the gullet, the intestines
and the stomach.

SY50 Three mothers: Alef, Mem, Shin; and seven double letters: Bet, Gimel,
Dalet; Kaf, Pe, Resh, Taw; and twelve simple letters: He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet,
Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof.

SY51 These are the twenty-two letters by which Yah, the Lord of Hosts, the
God of Israel, the Living God, God Almighty, high and lofty, dwelling for ever
and holy is his name(Is.57:15), laid the foundation.

SY52(1) He made He rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined
one with another, and formed with it Aries in the universe, Nisan in the
year, and the liver in mankind.

(2)He made Waw rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one
with another, and formed with it Taurus in the universe, Iyyar in the
year, and the gall in mankind.

(3)He made Zayin rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with
another, and formed with it Gemini in the universe, Sivan in the year, and

the spleen in mankind.

(4)He made Het rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Cancer in the universe, Tammuz in the year, and the gullet in mankind.

(5)He made Tet rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Leo in the universe, Av in the year, and the right kidney in mankind.

(6)He made Yod rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Virgo in the universe, Elul in the year, and the left kidney in mankind.

(7)He made Lamed rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Libra in the universe, Tishri in the year, and the intestines in mankind.

(8)He made Nun rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Scorpio in the universe, Marheshvan in the year, and the stomach in mankind.

(9)He made Samek rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Sagittarius in the universe, Kislev in the year, and the right hand in mankind.

(10)He made Ayin rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Capricorn in the universe, Tevet in the year, and the left hand in mankind.

(11)He made Sade rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Aquarius in the universe, Shevat in the year, and the right foot in mankind.

(12)He made Qof rule, and bound to it a crown, and combined one with another, and formed with it Pisces in the universe, Adar in the year, and the left foot in mankind.

SY53 He split up the witnesses and made each one stand by itself - the universe by itself, the year by itself, and mankind by itself.

SY54 Twelve simple letters: He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof.

(1)There was formed with He: Aries, Nisan, the liver, sight and blindness.

(2)There was formed with Waw: Taurus, Iyyar, the gall, hearing and deafness.

(3)There was formed with Zayin: Gemini, Sivan, the spleen, smelling and anosmia.

(4)There was formed with Het: Cancer, Tammuz, the gullet, talking and dumbness.

(5)There was formed with Tet: Leo, Av, the right kidney, eating and hunger.

(6)There was formed with Yod: Virgo, Elul, the left kidney, action and paralysis.

(7)There was formed with Lamed: Libra, Tishri, the intestines, sexual intercourse and impotence.

(8)There was formed with Nun: Scorpio, Marheshvan, the stomach, walking and lameness.

(9)There was formed with Samek: Sagittarius, Kislev, the right hand, anger and equanimity.

(10)There was formed with Ayin: Capricorn, Tevet, the left hand, laughter and sadness.

(11)There was formed with Sade: Aquarius, Shevat, the right leg, thought and thoughtlessness.

(12)There was formed with Qof: Pisces, Adar, the left leg, sleep and insomnia.

SY55 This is He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof. And they all adhere to the Hook, the Diurnal Sphere, and the heart.

SY56 Three matrices, seven double letters, and twelve simple ones: these are the twenty-two letters by which Yah, the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, the Living God, God Almighty, *high and lofty, dwelling for ever, and holy is his name*(Is.57:15), carved out (the universe). Yah - two names; Yahweh - four names; hosts - it is a sign in his host; God of Israel - he is a prince before God; Living God - three are called living: the Living God, running (=living) water, the tree of life; God Almighty - a strong God; Almighty (shadday) - so far sufficient(day). *high* - for he dwells in the height of the universe, higher than the highest; *and lofty* - for he lifts and supports both above and below, for all who lift are below and what they lift is above, but he is above and what he lifts is below, and he lifts and supports all his universe; *dwelling for ever* - for his kingdom is eternal and has no end; *and holy is his name* - for he is holy, and his servants are holy, and every day they say to him, "Holy, holy, holy"(Is.6:3).

SY57 Twelve below and seven above on top of them, and three on top of seven. And from the three of them he founded his abode. And they all depend on one - a sign for the One who has none second to him, a King unique in his universe, for he is one and his name one.

SY58 Three fathers and their offspring, and seven dominant ones and their hosts, and the twelve diagonal lines. And a proof for the matter - trustworthy witnesses: the universe, the year and mankind. The universe - its counting is by ten; the year - its counting is by ten; mankind - its counting is by ten. And there are twenty-two objects in each one. In the universe there are three: fire, air and water; and seven planets and twelve constellations. In the year there are three: cold, heat and the temperate state; and the seven days of creation, and the twelve months. In mankind there are three: the head, the belly and the chest; and the seven exits, and the twelve principal organs.

SY59 There is a law of ten, three, seven and twelve. They are present in the Hook, the diurnal sphere, and the heart. The Hook in the universe is like a king on his throne; the diurnal sphere in the year is like a king in a province; the heart in mankind is like a king at war.

SY60 The sum of the matter: in some cases these are combined with those, and those with these; these are opposites of those, and those of these; these correspond to those, and those to these; and if these do not exist, neither do those. *So God has created every object, one opposite the other*(cf.Eccles.7:14): good opposite evil - evil from evil and good from good. Good is stored up for the good.

SY61 When Abraham our father came, and looked, and saw, and investigated, and understood, and carved, and combined, and hewed, and pondered, and succeeded, the Lord of all was revealed to him. And he made him sit in his bosom, and kissed him upon his head. He called him his friend and named him

his son, and made a covenant with him and his seed for ever. And he trusted in the Lord, and he accounted it to him for righteousness (Gen.15:6). And he invoked upon him the glory of the Lord, as it is written: *Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, etc.* (Jer.1:5). He made with him a covenant between the ten toes of his feet - it is circumcision. He made with him a covenant between the ten fingers of his hands - it is language/the tongue. He bound twenty-two letters into his language/tongue, and the Holy One revealed to him the secret. He drew them out into water, he burned them into fire, he shook them into the air, he branded them into the seven, he led them into the twelve constellations.

SY62(1) Air, temperate state and chest; earth, cold and the belly; heaven, heat and the head. This is Alef, Mem, Shin.

(2) Saturn, sabbath and the mouth; Jupiter, the first day of the week and the right eye; Mars, the second day of the week and the left eye; the Sun, the third day of the week and the right nostril; Venus, the fourth day of the week and the left nostril; Mercury, the fifth day of the week and the right ear; the Moon, the sixth day of the week and the left ear. This Bet, Gimel, Dalet; Kaf, Pe, Resh, Taw.

(3) Aries, Nisan, the liver; Taurus, Iyyar, the gall; Gemini, Sivan, the spleen; Cancer, Tammuz, the gullet; Leo, Av, the right kidney; Virgo, Elul, the left kidney; Libra, Tishri, the intestines; Scorpio, Marheshvan, the stomach; Sagittarius, Kislev, the right hand; Capricorn, Tevet, the left hand; Aquarius, Shevat, the right foot; Pisces, Adar, the left foot. This is He, Waw, Zayin, Het, Tet, Yod, Lamed, Nun, Samek, Ayin, Sade, Qof.

SY63(1) Three are hostile. These are they: the tongue, the liver and the gall.

(2) Three love: the eyes, the ears and the heart.

(3) Three give life: the two nostrils and the liver of the left side.

(4) Three kill: the two lower orifices and the mouth.

(5) There are three which are in man's control: the hands, the feet, and the mouth.

(6) There are three which are not in man's control: his eyes, his ears and his nostrils.

(7) Three things are heard by the ear and they are evil: cursing, blasphemy and an evil report.

(8) Three good things are heard by the ear: blessing, praise and a good report.

(9) There are three evil sights: an adulterous leer, an evil eye and a deceptive look.

(10) There are three good sights: modesty, a good eye, and a trustworthy look.

(11) Three things are bad for the tongue: He who speaks evil in the presence of his fellow, he who slanders, and he who speaks one thing with the mouth but another with the heart.

(12) Three things are good for the tongue: silence, reticence, and speaking the truth.

SY64 This is the book of the letters of Abraham our father which is called "The Laws of creation". There is no limit to the wisdom of all who look into it.

APPENDIX 2

THE STRUCTURE OF SEFER YETSIRA

Paragraphs 1-16

THE TEN SEFIROT

These are the ten sefirot belima: the Spirit of the Living God, and aether, water, fire, above, below, east, west, north and south. (Para. 16)

Paragraphs 17-22

THE 22 LETTERS OF THE HEDREW ALPHABET

These are divided into three groups:

1. Alef(א- '), Mem(מ- m), Shin(ש- sh); the three matrices.
2. Bet, Gimel, Dalet, Kaf, Pe, Resh, Taw; the seven double letters.
3. The twelve simple letters; the rest of the Hebrew alphabet.

Paragraphs 23-36

THE THREE MATRICES

	Alef Balancing	Mem Negative	Shin Positive
Primordial elements	aether(ruah)	water(mayim)	fire('esh)
Universe(עולמות)	air('awir)	earth	heaven
Time(שנה)	humidity	cold	heat
Mankind(נפש)	chest	belly	head
Moral realm	law	guilt	acquittal

Paragraphs 37-44

THE SEVEN DOUBLE LETTERS

	Bet	Gimel	Dalet	Kaf	Pe	Resh	Taw
Universe	Saturn	Jupiter	Mars	Sun	Venus	Mercury	Moon
Time	sabbath	1st day	2nd day	3rd day	4th day	5th day	6th day
Mankind	mouth	right eye	left eye	right nostril	left nostril	right ear	left ear
Moral { pos. realm { neg.	life death	peace evil	wisdom folly	wealth poverty	prosperity desolation	beauty ugliness	mastery slavery

Space: the seven double letters also represent the six dimensions of space (Sefirot 5-10) + the Holy Temple(=God) in the middle(para. 38)

Paragraphs 45-55

THE TWELVE SIMPLE LETTERS

Universe : the 12 signs of the zodiac
 Time : the 12 months of the year
 Mankind : 12 bodily actions (sight, hearing, smelling, etc.)
 12 bodily organs (hands, feet, kidneys, liver, etc.)
 Space : the 12 diagonal lines which radiate out to the six dimensions of space = the arms of the universe (Para. 47).

Three main statements are made:

1. The correspondence of the macrocosm and the microcosm (Paras. 58-9).
2. The law of the opposites (Para. 60).
3. The revelation to Abraham of the power of the Hebrew language (Para. 61).